# The challenge of environmental governance: the case of mainstreaming biodiversity in productive landscapes, with specific reference to the Gouritz Initiative in the Western Cape[1]

**Nadia Wessels**
School of Public Leadership
Stellenbosch University
(nads.wessels@gmail.com)

**Kobus Müller**
School of Public Leadership
Stellenbosch University
(jjm1@sun.ac.za)

## Abstract

South Africa boasts one of the world's richest and most diverse natural landscapes and is world-renowned for its biodiversity. The Cape Floristic Region, particularly, is the world's sixth and smallest floral kingdom and the only one housed within the confines of a single country and predominantly within the Western Cape Province. It is also the richest, with more than 9 000 plant species. This region is considered one of the world's 25 most threatened biodiversity hotspots; most of the priority areas fall outside of existing statutorily protected areas and are mainly on privately owned land.

Ensuring ecological sustainability across a diverse range of productive sectors and landscapes requires partnerships and a form of environmental governance that mediates the interactions between society, the economy and ecological functions. The collaborative environmental governance process is complex, as a result of the multitude and diverse range of socio-economic and political issues; the cross-cutting nature of environmental issues that span national, provincial and local spheres of government; and the uncertainty and unpredictability of ecological processes and functions, particularly on a landscape scale.

This article focuses on the Gouritz Initiative, a landscape-scale conservation and development initiative in the Western Cape. It was established in recognition of the challenges of concurrent governance for the long-term protection of the area's globally significant biodiversity. The continued efforts of collaborative planning, implementation and adaptation in the Gouritz Initiative have demonstrated that despite the complex, ongoing challenges associated

with cooperative environmental governance, conservation initiatives can be successful if society's needs, most of which are socio-economic, are balanced with the need for biodiversity protection.

**Keywords:** biodiversity, collaborative environmental governance, co-management, Gouritz Initiative, partnerships, South Africa, Western Cape

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has economic, social and ecological components, and hence an ecologically sustainable future is dependent on the continuation of ecological processes and functions (Brunckhorst 2002:108–116). Conservation strategies that are limited only to the establishment of public reserves are not able to meet the objectives of biodiversity representivity, and the persistence of ecological and evolutionary processes in the long term (Driver, Cowling and Maze 2003:7–9). Because of the limited effectiveness of strict reservation for biodiversity protection, conservation planners advocate biodiversity management across all living landscapes, covering both production and protection areas (Margules and Pressey 2000:243; Driver et al. 2003:7–9). Consequently, biodiversity protection is increasingly becoming the shared responsibility of the different productive sectors, such as agriculture, mining and forestry, as well as the urban and rural development sectors (Driver et al. 2003:1).

Biodiversity concerns therefore need to be integrated or 'mainstreamed' into the activities of the different sectors. Mainstreaming biodiversity entails the internalisation of the goals of biodiversity protection and the sustainable use of resources in the policies, programmes and strategies of all sectors, thus influencing all human behaviour (Cowling 2005:18). Sharing the responsibility for biodiversity protection across a diverse range of sectors, many of which have traditionally ignored such concerns, requires partnerships and a form of environmental governance that mediates the relationships and interactions between society, the economy, and ecological functions and processes (Brunckhorst 2002:108–109).

Mainstreaming biodiversity poses significant governance challenges, given that the primary functions of the different productive sectors are generally at variance with protection of biodiversity. The first part of this article will consider the theoretical insights pertaining to environmental governance in general, including thoughts on the meaning and principles of environmental governance, with an emphasis on collaboration; the challenges of collaboration and mainstreaming of biodiversity in productive landscapes; and the policy and legal framework pertaining to environmental governance and mainstreaming of biodiversity. This is followed by a description of the Gouritz Initiative, which is a multi-stakeholder, long-term,

landscape-scale conservation and development initiative in the Western Cape, South Africa. This initiative aims, through establishing partnerships, to conserve and restore priority biodiversity in identified corridors in the planning domain, while simultaneously providing social and economic opportunities for local communities and promoting sustainable land management. The third section reflects on the challenges and prospects of the Gouritz Initiative in the light of the theoretical points of departure.

# 2 ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

## 2.1 The meaning of environmental governance

Governance is about the interaction between governments, social organisations and civil society, and the way that important decisions are collectively made within a complex world (Graham, Amos and Plumptre 2003:1). Good governance is dependent on the ability to make sound decisions across a range of environmental, social and economic concerns over time. It is linked to the maintenance of partnerships, the capacity for knowledge, mediation and resource allocation and implementation (Hardallu 2001). According to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), environmental governance, which essentially concerns the 'sustainable management of natural resources' (DEAT 2006:34), is therefore not the sole responsibility of government (Steiner, Kimball and Scanlan 2003:228), but requires collaboration, partnerships, co-managements and negotiation with all stakeholders, including civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses and land owners (Steiner et al. 2003:227; Müller 2009:83).

The following principles of good governance, some of which overlap, have been adopted from Graham et al. (2003:3) and Bovaird (2004:210–211).

- *Legitimacy and voice (citizen engagement):* All citizens and other stakeholders should, either directly or through a legitimate institution, have a voice in decision making; and stakeholders need to be willing to collaborate.
- *Leadership and direction*: Leadership is necessary at all levels of partnerships to provide strategic direction, and leaders need to understand the socio-economic, cultural and historical contexts, as well as the complexities of their respective constituencies, to ensure effective partnerships.
- *Accountability:* All partners must account to one another and the public for processes and actions implemented, and for the performance of the partnership.

- *Transparency:* All affected stakeholders must have direct access to institutions and to understandable processes and information. Building trust relationships requires transparency by all stakeholders.
- *Fairness*: Fair procedures and due processes, together with equality and social inclusion, are fundamental for successful partnerships. Any legal and policy frameworks must be fair and impartially enforced.
- *Sustainability*: The sustainability of policies and actions requires partners to respond continuously to the needs of stakeholders and changing circumstances.

## 2.2 Collaborative environmental governance

Various terms are used interchangeably to refer to collaboration, such as co-management, participatory management, stewardship, multi-stakeholder processes and pluralism (Hara 2003: 19; Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:64–70). Margerum (2008:487) describes collaboration as the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders from a broad cross-section of organisations engaging in an intensive process of consensus building in search of innovative solutions, and sustained commitment to problem solving. Co-management – a form of collaboration – is defined by Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2004:69–70) as a partnership in which relevant role-players develop and implement a management agreement. It is based on the principle that local communities have a role in conservation and management, and that partnerships with government are essential (Hara 2003: 20).

Collaborative resource management and associated processes strive to facilitate the expression of concerns by all role-players, taking advantage of diverse stakeholder capacity. Effective organisation and the willingness to reach consensus by stakeholders is therefore essential. The purpose of consensus building is to meet the needs of all participants, facilitating acceptance of responsibility for the solution and its implementation (Carley and Christie 2000:184). Where stakeholders have conflicting interests, the negotiation process, in pursuit of the common good, attempts to underscore the fact that agreement among stakeholders is more advantageous than pursuing contrasting interests (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:69, 103–105). Teamwork required for consensus building requires leadership that is emotionally intelligent, as concealed agendas and power struggles need to be effectively managed. Effectively managed teamwork also facilitates collaborative learning (Cowling et al. 2008:9484).

The involvement of civil society in collaborative processes increases the knowledge base for influencing decisions and plays an increasingly important role in achieving participatory democracy (Hara 2003:20–23; Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:103–105). Power sharing and the equitable distribution of benefits in the joint

decision-making process also uplift the less powerful stakeholders. The capability of different stakeholders and the willingness of governments to delegate will determine the stakeholders' respective responsibilities (Hara 2003:24, 29). Collaborative management therefore adopts the subsidiarity principle, which requires governments to decentralise tasks and responsibilities to the lowest level in society that is capable of effectively managing the specific tasks (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:356; Müller 2009:78); it calls for the maximisation of civil society participation (Carley and Christie 2000:184–185).

Given the declining financial and capacity resources of many state institutions, collaboration provides the opportunity for maximising the efficient utilisation of resources and competencies (Bovaird 2004:202). By acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of institutions and other stakeholders, collaboration deviates substantially from the simplified approach to governance (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:103–105).

## 2.3 Challenges to collaboration in productive landscapes

Collaborative partnerships, as a form of good governance, provide the opportunity for the sustainable management of natural resources and hence for mainstreaming biodiversity in productive landscapes. However, collaboration among the many diverse sectors that are characteristic of productive landscapes also poses significant challenges, some of which are outlined below.

Mainstreaming biodiversity in productive landscapes necessitates an understanding of the ecological and socio-economic dynamics of the landscape (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:64), and of the inherent conflicts between biodiversity protection and socio-economic development (Cowling and Wilhelm-Rechmann 2007:135). Private property rights generally do not address how to deal with environmental externalities that prevent the interconnection and persistence of ecosystem functions on a landscape scale, while the societal focus on economic growth ignores the fundamental link between socio-economic development and environmental sustainability (Brunckhorst 2002:112–113).

While the systematic conservation planning process has been effective in determining the species, landscapes and processes to be protected, it has generally not addressed the complex and diverse socio-economic context within which conservation planning initiatives need to operate (Knight, Cowling and Campbell 2005:409, 410). The social context of an area should be assessed prior to, or simultaneously with, the biodiversity assessment (Brunckhorst 2002:108–116; Knight et al. 2005:414–416; Cowling et al. 2008:9484). According to Cowling and Wilhelm-Rechmann (2007:135), a social assessment will reflect the opportunities

for, and constraints on, implementation of conservation and mainstreaming initiatives by identifying: (i) the present and future pressures on biodiversity based on the interactions of society with the natural environment; (ii) opportunities for synergy between conservation and other sectors where biodiversity protection can be mainstreamed; and (iii) the institutional and organisational constraints in terms of capacity and effectiveness. The involvement of local experts and representatives in the social assessment who support the conservation initiatives also facilitates the targeting of specific actions to these stakeholders, who will have a positive influence on the conservation initiatives and attempts at mainstreaming biodiversity (Cowling and Wilhelm-Rechmann 2007:135).

According to Brunckhorst (2002:112), significant institutional barriers to sustainable natural resource management are entrenched, compartmentalised institutional structures with conservative management cultures and jurisdictional barriers, and modifying problematic structures rather than developing new structures. However, reliance on institutional reform alone cannot ensure sustainable resource management (Carley and Christie 2000:143–154). The diverse network of institutions and participants involved in the management and use of productive landscapes prevents the implementation of a simple management solution by a single agency (Brown and Mitchell 2000:70–71; Carley and Christie 2000:141). In addition, the consequences of management intervention in such complex natural and socio-economic systems are often uncertain. Collaborative institutions therefore need to learn to manage adaptively within this endemic uncertainty and unpredictability (Carley and Christie 2000:155–158, 177–178).

Ideally, co-management and collaborative processes and institutions are inclusive, multi-level and multi-disciplinary. However, the introduction of collaborative and co-management structures, especially in the initial stages, is time consuming and may be expensive because of the intensive consultation required in establishing institutional arrangements (Hara 2003:31). The transaction costs of collaboration therefore often limit the extent of stakeholders' inclusiveness in the process (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:103–105), and the resultant exclusion of certain stakeholder groups can detract from the legitimacy of the structure and the process (Hara 2003:13–36).

Accountability in partnerships will be adversely affected if stakeholders represent their individual interests, as opposed to the collective interests of their constituencies (Küpçü 2005:102–103). While local government is an important role-player in collaborative structures for overseeing accountability and equity in the process, it should not be assumed that local governments necessarily represent the interests of their constituencies (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:103–106). Power imbalances between the different sectors may result if government off-loads

its partnership responsibilities (Küpçü 2005:95). The burden for government may also increase in public-private partnerships, where governments are required to supervise accountability and effective co-ordination (Salamon 1995).

In South Africa, collaboration has its own unique challenges, despite the country's democratisation and its constitutional commitments to public participation and the recognition of local knowledge. Historically the majority of the South African population was marginalised from participative decision making (Müller and Decadt 2003:357), and many were forced off their land for the sake of establishing protected areas, from which they were then excluded (Khan 2002:18–19). Biodiversity protection is thus not a priority for many communities trapped in a cycle of poverty with little or no access to basic services, despite government commitments to improve the quality of their lives. Rebuilding trust – the quintessence of consensus building (Carley and Christie 2000:185) – in these communities is a prerequisite for garnering their support for successful collaboration.

## 2.4 Policy and legal framework for mainstreaming biodiversity

According to Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2004:344–350, 376–382), the significance of collaborative partnerships in the sustainable management of natural resources is entrenched in international and national policy.

Internationally, the traditional preservationist approach to conservation changed in the early 1990s to include issues of equity, social justice and power relations (Wynberg 2002:233–234). This holistic approach to biodiversity-related issues was the foundation for the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD) adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit, as it is commonly known, in Rio de Janeiro. This approach also underpinned the adoption of Agenda 21 (Wynberg 2002:233–234; Elliot 2004:7). Contracting parties are required to adopt the 'ecosystem approach' entrenched in the CBD (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:376–382), which recognises that humans are an integral component of ecosystems (see Table 1 for the 12 interrelated principles of the ecosystem approach).

**Table 1:** Principles of the ecosystem approach (modified from Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 1998)

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| **Principle 1** | Management objectives are a matter of societal choice. |
| **Principle 2** | Management should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level (principle of subsidiarity). |
| **Principle 3** | The actual or potential effects of activities on adjacent and other ecosystems should be considered by ecosystem managers. |

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| **Principle 4** | Ecosystems must be understood and managed in an economic context. |
| **Principle 5** | A key feature of the ecosystem approach includes conservation of ecosystem structure and functioning. |
| **Principle 6** | Ecosystems must be managed within the limits of their functioning |
| **Principle 7** | The ecosystem approach should be undertaken at the appropriate scale. |
| **Principle 8** | Objectives for ecosystem management should be set for the long term, in recognition of the characteristic varying temporal scale and lag effects of ecosystem processes. |
| **Principle 9** | Management must recognise that change is inevitable. |
| **Principle 10** | The ecosystem approach should seek the appropriate balance between conservation and use of biodiversity. |
| **Principle 11** | The ecosystem approach should consider all relevant information, scientific, indigenous and local knowledge; innovations and practices. |
| **Principle 12** | The ecosystem approach should involve all relevant sectors of society and scientific disciplines. |

Agenda 21 is a detailed plan of action for implementing the principles of the Earth Summit (Elliot 2004:19; Secretariat of the CBD 2005). Signatory countries to the CBD are also required to develop national biodiversity strategies and action plans to meet the commitment for an ecosystem approach (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004:349–350; DEAT 2005:7–8). The Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is funded by the World Bank, provides financial assistance for signatory countries to implement the requirements of the CBD (Petersen and Huntley 2005:3).

Historically, conservation in South Africa was associated with colonialism and apartheid, and adopted a strict preservationist approach. People were separated from nature and access to natural resources was generally restricted to a limited, privileged sector of society, often at the expense of black communities who were forcibly relocated (Peart and Wilson 1998:237–267; Khan 2002:15–48; Wynberg 2002:234; Rossouw and Wiseman 2004:131). Recognition of the need for sustainable development and natural resource management is attributed to the international paradigm shift in how natural resources are used and managed, and the democratisation of South Africa in the 1990s.

The constitutional democracy introduced fundamental changes to the responsibilities of the national, provincial and local spheres of government. The environment is a national and provincial concurrent competency, shared by all three interdependent and inter-related spheres of government, as environmental responsibilities may also be assigned to the local spheres of government. All

spheres of government must adhere to the principles of cooperative governance and intergovernmental relations prescribed in the Constitution, Act no 108 of 1996. As environmental concerns and therefore environmental management are by nature cross-sectoral, the shared functions of the different spheres of government have resulted in fragmentation and lack of clarity over environment-related responsibilities (Peart and Wilson 1998:242–252).

In South Africa the National Environmental Management Act, no 107 of 1998 (NEMA) is the overarching environmental framework legislation, which provides for integrated environmental management and environmental governance. NEMA gives effect to the constitutional imperative for 'the right to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations … through measures that … secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development' (section 24 of the Constitution). In recognition of the significance of cooperative governance, the act also establishes statutory institutions to promote cooperative governance, and develops procedures to facilitate integration and coordination of the environmental functions of government. NEMA also prescribes environmental principles (referred to as the NEMA principles) applicable to all organs of state in decision making in respect of matters affecting the environment (South Africa 1998). The NEMA principles may be categorised into a number of themes, namely: (i) sustainable development; (ii) decision making and cooperative governance; (iii) environmental assessment and management; (iv) environmental justice; and (v) stakeholder engagement (Rossouw and Wiseman 2004:135, 136). Central to the NEMA principles is that 'development must be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable' (section 2(3)). In implementing the NEMA principles a major challenge is the need to balance the environmental rights and long-term biodiversity loss with short- to medium-term social and economic development (Wynberg 2002:242; Rossouw and Wiseman 2004:135); another challenge is the fragmented environmental responsibilities of the different spheres of government.

Within the framework of NEMA (1998), the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), no 10 of 2004, and the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, no 57 of 2003 (NEMPA) provide mechanisms and tools for the management and conservation of biodiversity. NEMBA obliged the minister to prepare and adopt a national biodiversity framework and to monitor the implementation of such a framework by reviewing and amending it at least every five years. This led to the conception and realisation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Assessment Programme (NBSAP), which goes hand in hand with the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment (NSBA), both completed in 2005. NEMBA (2004) therefore plays a fundamental role in the conservation of biodiversity, whether on- or

off-reserve, as it allows for bioregional plans and for legislative management plans for maintaining biodiversity in ecosystems. NEMBA therefore also gives effect to the requirements of the CBD for an ecosystem approach (and the development of a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan) to integrate conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity into all strategies, programmes and policies, as well as for participatory governance and co-management.

NEMPA (2003) was promulgated with the aim of providing protection for those areas that are ecologically viable and representative of South Africa's natural assets. NEMPA (2003) further allows the Minister or MEC to provide certain areas with protection by means of a range of different options, from the declaration of such areas as special nature reserves, enjoying a high protection status, to more flexible agreements regarding management, subject to a process of public participation and consultation with organs of state.

An option for biodiversity conservation – without formal protection under NEMPA – is the biosphere concept for landscape management developed by the United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco). Biospheres typically cover multiple jurisdictions and involve diverse stakeholders on a voluntary basis, who retain control of their respective components. The support and involvement of the local community are key to its success (Pasquini 2008:14). Of South Africa's six biosphere reserves, three are located in the Cape Floristic Kingdom in the Western Cape.

## 3 THE GOURITZ INITIATIVE

### 3.1 Introduction

The Cape Action Plan for People and the Environment (C.A.P.E.) was initiated in 1998 with an initial grant from the GEF to develop a bioregional strategic programme in response to the threat to the Cape Floristic Region, which has been identified as one of the worlds 'hottest' hotspots of biodiversity. C.A.P.E. was formally institutionalised in 2001 as a network, when a memorandum of understanding was signed by the stakeholders. C.A.P.E. has since mobilised project funding (US$ 3 million) through the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), leveraging extensive agency co-financing and partnership arrangements to implement the strategy through various initiatives (Müller 2007:51–52). A central element of the C.A.P.E. strategy is using a landscape-level approach to biodiversity conservation, through 'landscape initiatives' that take various forms, including corridor initiatives, mega-reserves

and biosphere reserves. The Gouritz Biodiversity Corridor is one of several landscape initiatives.

The vision for the Gouritz Initiative, developed in consultation with stakeholders, is: 'by the year 2020 the Gouritz biodiversity corridor supports a system of sustainable living landscapes that is representative of the region's biodiversity through co-existence of stakeholders' (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:3). Objectives for achieving the vision include: a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to conservation and development; securing biodiversity targets for priority conservation corridors through stewardship; and assisting and empowering the communities in the planning domain to develop sustainable livelihoods from conservation and the use of natural resources (Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Programme 2005). The project is partly funded by the CEPF, which aims to assist NGOs, community groups and civil society to protect biodiversity hotspots (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:2).

## 3.2 Planning domain for the Gouritz Initiative

In 2003 the initial planning for the Gouritz Initiative focused on the preparation of a management plan for the conservation and restoration of the north-south Gouritz River conservation corridor. However, the scientific assessment of the unique biodiversity of the area resulted in the inclusion of the east-west mountain corridors to facilitate species movement associated with the rainfall seasonality in the area (Ashwell et al. 2006:80–81). Consequently, the planning domain for the Gouritz Initiative approximately doubled in size to over 3.2 million hectares (32 693 km²), of which about 26% are under some form of conservation protection and at least 13% had been transformed by 1998 (Lombard, Wolf and Strauss 2004:4, 17). To facilitate effective planning and management, the planning domain was divided into five management sectors (see Figure 1). Scientific assessment identified specific biodiversity projects, the associated beneficiary communities and the most appropriate institutions for managing and implementing these projects (Lombard et al. 2004:83). The planning phase of the Gouritz Initiative culminated in the preparation of a strategic management and business plan, providing the basis for project implementation (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:2).

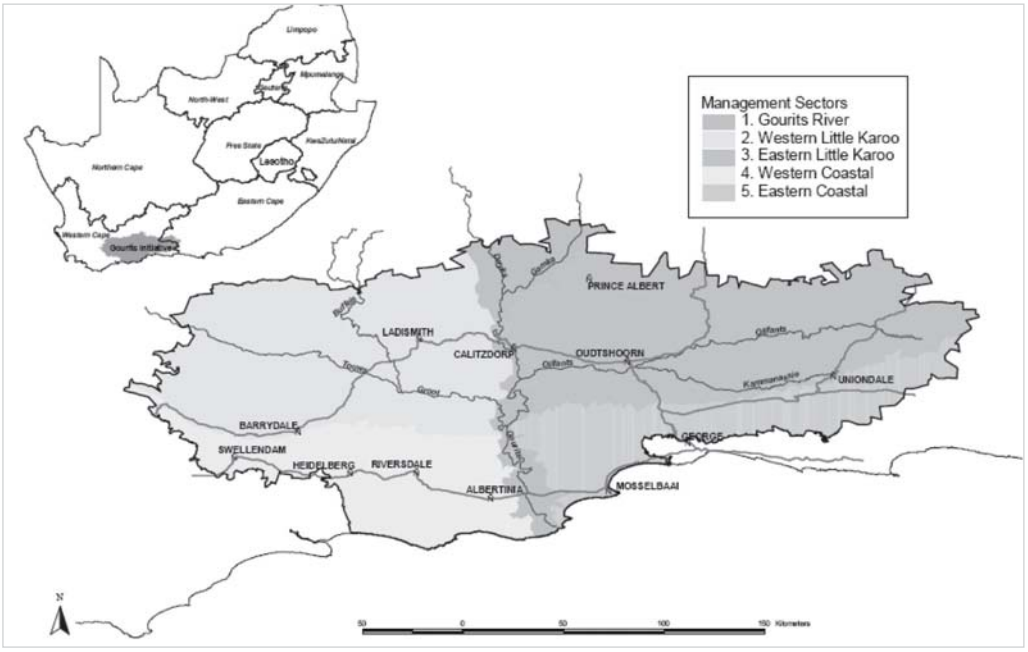


**Figure 1:** The planning domain for the Gouritz Initiative, Western Cape
Source: Lombard et al., 2004:6

Agriculture is the most important economic activity and the largest employer in the region (Le Maitre and O'Farrell 2008:339–382), despite the area being referred to as a marginal farming area (Ashwell et al. 2006:82). Since the mid-1990s, the traditional crop and livestock production has been replaced by ostrich production, predominantly for meat, and lucerne as the main ostrich feed (Reyers et al. 2009:47). The growing ostrich industry exceeds the carrying capacity of the land approximately fivefold (Reyers et al. 2009:47). Similarly, the water demand from the Gouritz River basin exceeds the sustainable yield, with approximately 90% of the water being used for irrigation (Le Maitre and O'Farrell 2008:339–382). Coastal development, alien plant invasions and habitat transformation caused by agriculture are the major threats to approximately 50% of the endemic habitat types in the planning domain (Lombard et al. 2004:67–80).

As in most parts of South Africa, there is a strong divide between rich and poor in the domain, which is directly related to the previously advantaged and disadvantaged groups respectively. The largest proportion of the planning domain is rural, with a high percentage of impoverished communities (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:17). The rich cultural heritage, together with the open landscape and scenery, increases the economic importance of tourism in the area, with tourist

accommodation and recreational opportunities being an alternative source of income for many land owners in the area (Reyers et al. 2009:43, 50).

## 3.3 Collaborative environmental governance processes for the Gouritz Initiative

The planning phase of the Gouritz Initiative commenced in 2003. It was initially coordinated by an independent steering committee consisting of 28 representatives from key partners, including government departments (and Cape Nature), local authorities, NGOs and land owners (Reyers et al. 2009:41, 42; Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2005:1–9). A wider group of stakeholders representing land owners, businesses and scientists are represented on the larger Gouritz Initiative Forum (Reyers et al. 2009:41, 42). The forum, which has over 80 representatives (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2005:7), focuses on specific stakeholder needs and concerns, and how these should be addressed, for example water security, flood damage and land degradation associated with the expanding ostrich industry (Reyers et al. 2009:41–43).

Although the steering committee accepted the strategic management and business plan for the Gouritz Initiative, there were continuing challenges regarding the steering committee in both the planning and implementation stages. Key stakeholders on the steering committee viewed the Initiative as an environmental pressure group, the purpose of which was to oppose all developments within the planning domain, and to influence the activities and operations of Cape Nature. In addition, the implications of the Gouritz Initiative as a landscape-scale conservation initiative were not fully acknowledged (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:21). As a result, the steering committee did not fulfil its oversight, advisory and facilitation roles as prescribed in its constitution. The functions of the steering committee were subsequently successfully fulfilled by the larger Gourtiz Initiative Forum, which became the collective structure through which stakeholder consensus was facilitated, and which is largely responsible for the success of the project so far (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:3, 11).

Despite the problems experienced in the steering committee, a major strength of the Gouritz Initiative is its multi-stakeholder engagement (Ashwell et al. 2006:79–82). By July 2004 the database of stakeholders exceeded 3 300, and before July 2005 over 400 meetings, workshops and discussions had already been held (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:9, 15, 17, 18). It was acknowledged that stakeholder engagement for the Gouritz Initiative required a multifaceted and multidimensional approach to account for the vast extent and the diverse socio-economic characteristics within the planning domain. Given the geographical extent,

it was impractical and therefore unrealistic to expect all stakeholders to attend the same meetings. Consequently, many group and one-on-one meetings were held with certain stakeholders, particularly the local authorities and the rural communities; in cases where land consolidation was proposed, individual discussions with respective farm owners were essential.

The dilemma within the steering committee and the associated adverse impacts on the delivery of the Gouritz Initiative led to an independent review of its progress and an investigation into the optimal governance structure for its future and continued implementation (Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) 2009:1–4). The review concluded that the planning domain, which accounts for approximately 25% of the land area of the Western Cape province, was too extensive for achieving meaningful progress in terms of project implementation and stakeholder engagement, given the existing available resources (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:1, 21, 22). Consequently, in March 2008 implementation of the Initiative changed to focus only on the primary Gouritz River corridor.

Through a consultative stakeholder process, the review also determined that a cluster biosphere model was the preferred institutional vehicle for the continuation of the Gouritz Initiative, as this would satisfy stakeholders that were opposed to Cape Nature being the key partner and institutional home for the project (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:5, 24, 29). According to Pasquini (2008:13, 14), a cluster biosphere model is preferable for the Gouritz Initiative because of the fragmented and transformed nature of the landscape, and the extensive size of the planning domain, which prohibits effective management as a single entity. The necessary process for submission of an application for a cluster biosphere reserve to Unesco for approval, which may take a number of years, has since been initiated (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:3, 5, 11). In the meantime a not-for-profit company, which will serve as governance vehicle, has been established in 2011 awaiting Unesco approval (I. Donian, pers. comm.).

Cape Nature had assumed the coordination function of the Gouritz Initiative towards the end of 2006 after the consecutive resignation of two project coordinators, as no other members on the steering committee were prepared to fulfil this coordination role (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:2, 22). For this purpose, a project management unit for the Gouritz Initiative has been established under the leadership of Cape Nature. The mandate of Cape Nature is to establish a ‘conservation economy’ by integrating the principles and practices of biodiversity conservation into all forms of economic activity through community-based resource management such as the stewardship programmes (the conservation of ecologically significant habitat remnants, through incentive mechanisms, and the incorporation

of private and communal land in the establishment of biodiversity corridors) (Cape Nature 2010). Successful projects that are on-going include

- the development of management guidelines for the ostrich industry to promote the sustainable utilisation of the veld;
- a biodiversity route, which has been established with private land owners and communities in the Gouritz Corridor, as part of a biodiversity and tourism project; and
- the protected areas expansion project, and its associated land consolidation strategy within the Gouritz Corridor, which has to date secured 86 000 hectares of privately owned land as part of a stewardship programme (Cape Nature 2008:17–19; Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:12, 19).

## 3.4 Prospects and challenges

This section analyses, evaluates and reflects on the prospects and challenges facing the Gouritz Initiative from its initiation in 2003 until now.

- The determination of the planning domain of the Gouritz Initiative was based mainly on scientific biodiversity data, without properly taking into consideration the socio-economic and political characteristics of such a geographically extensive area. A social assessment of the planning domain early in the planning process would have assisted in identifying the potential institutional constraints and opportunities for the project. For example, the tension in the relationships between certain land owners and conservation authorities, which resulted in the non-acceptance of Cape Nature as the institutional home for the Gouritz Initiative, would have been identified, as well as the capacity constraints of the municipalities and the competing municipal priorities, which inhibited the implementation of particular projects identified for the Gouritz Initiative.
- The identification of projects when the initiative was conceived, although scientifically sound and credible among certain stakeholders and donor funders, was done by engaging only some government departments, while consultation with the local communities commenced only after the identification of projects.
- The initial disregard for the multi-stakeholder engagement process required for effective collaboration and implementation in such a geographically extensive area has had an adverse effect on the collaborative process in terms of nurturing relationships of trust, as those role-players who had been

initially excluded from the consultation process questioned the legitimacy of the process.

- Despite this false start, community support for the Gouritz Initiative has been garnered by the active stakeholder engagement process subsequent to determining the planning domain, and by the involvement and empowerment of communities in projects. The collaborative efforts between the project team, organised agriculture (agricultural unions), emergent farmers and the Department of Agriculture have changed the perception that stakeholders' views are not taken into account (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2005:1–4). Successful stakeholder engagement ensured that the productive agricultural areas were excluded from proposed conservation initiatives; this enabled the biodiversity scientists to obtain the farmers' support for conservation-related proposals on marginal agricultural land (Ashwell et al. 2006:81, 82). The interactive communication between the biodiversity scientists and the farmers was open and transparent, resulting in relationships of trust as well as support for the initiative from a significant proportion of the farming community.
- However, the process consumed both time and resources, and therefore affected the overall implementation. Another disadvantage of the multi-stakeholder engagement process, also because of the size of the domain, is that certain stakeholders were communicating with the project team only and had no direct interaction with other stakeholders, as a result of the geographical practicalities.
- Because of perceptions that specific interests were trying to capture the process, the steering committee for the Gouritz Initiative did not share a collective vision and could not, or were not willing to, collaborate to reach consensus, without which successful implementation cannot be effected. However, the lack of consensus and its negative effect on the progress were recognised and dealt with positively by an independent review of the entire process and the determination of an appropriate independent institutional vehicle for its successful continuation.
- After taking over the coordination function, Cape Nature, as the key government institution responsible for implementing the priority projects with CEPF funding, also became responsible for ensuring accountability and effective coordination of the steering committee and its functions. Such dual responsibilities do not, however, accord with the principles advocated for effective environmental governance.

- Although recently promulgated environmental legislation in South Africa recognises the significance of cooperative governance and collaborative partnerships in sustainable resource management, much of the narrow, sector-based natural resource-related legislation that existed before the promulgation of environmental legislation is still applicable. For example, it is illegal, in terms of the agricultural regulations, for jackal-proof fencing between farms to be removed to facilitate animal migration into the conservation corridors, as the removal will no longer prohibit movement of the so-called problem animals, such as jackals and caracals, across farms. With respect to the tourism potential of farms, the agricultural regulations do not permit old agricultural lands, where the endemic natural habitat has already been lost, to be used for tourist accommodation, but instead require undeveloped (virgin) land to be used for such purposes (Ashwell et al. 2006:82). Legislation enacted prior to new environmental legislation should therefore be reviewed and the necessary amendments made in order to facilitate a holistic approach by all government departments to ensure integrated and sustainable resource management.
- The Gouritz Initiative has been successful in demonstrating tangible, sustainable socio-economic benefits of biodiversity protection to local communities, many of which are impoverished; this has assisted in altering the common perception of conservation and development being mutually exclusive. The implementation of the Gouritz Corridor projects has leveraged funding for the implementation of various multi-departmental initiatives for community-based resource management within the planning domain, like the Working for Water, Working on Fire and Working for Wetlands programmes. An innovative feature of these programmes is their underlying socio-economic and developmental focus on people by improving livelihoods, providing poverty relief and skills development by making employment opportunities available. To this effect, at least 230 employment opportunities for unemployed people have been created per annum since the implementation of the Gouritz Corridor projects commenced in 2005 (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:8, 20).
- Municipalities have a key role to play in achieving the vision of the Gouritz Initiative, as land-use decisions, and decisions pertaining to the use of natural resources are generally made and implemented at a local (municipal) level. In terms of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, no 32 of 2000, every municipality is required to adopt an integrated development plan (IDP), which must include a spatial development framework as a core component (South Africa 2000). The C.A.P.E. bioregional programmes, which incorporate

biodiversity, social and economic factors into identified projects, and which form part of the Gouritz Initiative, should therefore serve as fundamental informants in all municipal planning and decision making, in both the spatial and the socio-economic contexts – for example, decisions guiding land-use planning and decisions related to local economic development. But, despite the one-on-one meetings held with the various local authorities as part of the multi-stakeholder engagement strategy, there has been little support from the seven municipalities within the planning domain, apart from the Hessequa and Oudtshoorn municipalities, for the incorporation into municipal planning of the projects identified in the Gouritz Initiative (Western Cape Nature Conservation Board 2009:11, 21, 24).

- Although Cape Nature and its partners have secured adequate operational funding to implement the priority activities in the Gouritz Corridor, and other priority areas, funding has to date not been secured for the continued expansion of the protected areas network, particularly in terms of stewardship and corridor staff. Should this funding issue not be resolved, it will detract from the long-term sustainability of the conservation corridor expansion project.

## CONCLUSION

Environmental governance is a long-term process of collaboration and partnerships to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources. The process is complicated by the multitude and diverse range of socio-economic and political issues; the cross-cutting nature of environmental issues that span national, provincial and local spheres of government; and the uncertainty and unpredictability of ecological processes and functions, particularly on a landscape scale.

The expansive domain of the Gouritz Initiative – a landscape-scale conservation and development initiative – is indicative of the ecological, social and economic diversity of the area, and the associated challenges of environmental governance. The path to sustainability, where biodiversity is mainstreamed into all sectors, requires resilience, patience and flexibility as well as changes in traditional policies, land use and interactions. The continued efforts of collaborative planning, implementation and adaptation in the Gouritz Initiative have demonstrated that conservation initiatives can be successful if society's needs, most of which are socio-economic, are balanced with the need for biodiversity protection. The successes of the initiative can partly be attributed to its alignment with the internationally funded C.A.P.E. bioregional planning programme; Cape Nature's committed mandate to establish a conservation

economy, reflecting the institution's adoption of the ecosystem approach as well as a significant change to the traditional institutional conservation approach; and the involvement and commitment of stakeholders, despite many and continuous challenges.

While the proposed Cluster Biosphere Reserve will still face significant governance challenges, as with any long-term, landscape-scale conservation initiative, it represents an appropriate independent institutional vehicle for the furtherance of the agreed-upon vision for the Gouritz Initiative. Although the collective challenges of natural resource management cannot be solved by a prototype institutional arrangement, the Gouritz Initiative, from inception to date, provides valuable lessons for future collaborative governance and mainstreaming biodiversity in South Africa.

## NOTE

1 This article is partly based on a paper entitled *The challenge of environmental governance: the case of mainstreaming biodiversity in productive landscapes with specific reference to the Gouritz Initiative in the Western Cape, South Africa*, delivered by one co-author at the Annual National Conference of The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) on the theme Public Administration without Borders**,** Baltimore, MD, March 15–16, 2011, and forms part of a project supported by the National Research Foundation.

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